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SPEECH BY DR TAY ENG SOON, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE (EDUCATION), AT THE SEMINAR ON CHORAL TRAINING AT TEMASEK JUNIOR COLLEGE ON SATURDAY, 6 MAY 1989 AT 9.00 AM

I am very pleased to be present at your seminar on the Choral Programme for schools and to be welcomed by such beautiful singing by the Temasek Junior College Choir.

Singing has always been an integral part of all our cultures in Singapore. But it has only been in recent years that we have, as a nation, begun to encourage mass community singing. In a sense, we are relatively late starters compared with many other countries.

To give the lead in this, even Members of Parliament have become involved. MPs are better known for speaking than for singing. But we felt that if we want the nation to sing, particularly at National Day Parade, we should set the example.

"Sing Singapore" has caught on at the grassroot level. RCs, company groups, community centres now have singing groups. We are not yet a singing nation as the Welsh or the Italians are. But we have made a start. We have started to let our inhibitions down. Many groups are now singing for the sheer pleasure of doing so.

Today's Seminar is the first among a number that will seek to develop not just group singing, but choral excellence amongst our secondary schools and junior colleges. The aim is to encourage every school to have a choral group, just as today, every school has a military or concert band.

The school programme will enable every school to form a choir so that students who like singing and have a vocal talent can develop their skill and enjoy choral singing. The school choir will show the rest of the school what good choral singing is like and of course provide another cultural and music activity for the students.

The Ministry has formed a Choral Advisory Committee comprising a number of well-known local choral and music personalities under the chairmanship of Mr Choo Hwee Lim who is himself a baritone singer and choir conductor. I want to thank these persons for coming forward to help us in our new programme. The Committee will advise the Ministry on how to develop the programme and improve the standards of choral singing in our schools. The ECA Centre has also formed a Choral Project Team to work with the schools. They will run workshops for teachers who want to become choir conductors and will work with small groups of schools to improve their programmes. Overseas choral experts will also be invited to come to hold workshops for choir teachers.

As a further step to enhance the programme, a group of 10 schools and junior colleges have been selected on the basis of their past records to take part in a choral excellence programme. They will be given additional assistance and will be "seed schools" to show what is possible and can be achieved in choral excellence. Temasek Junior College Choir which sang for us earlier is one of this group of 10.

During the Singapore Youth Festival in July this year, one of the highlights will be a choral competition. School choirs will be able to come together to compete and perform before an audience and a panel of expert judges. We hope that this and future choir festivals will stimulate interest and raise standards of choral singing in our schools.

Perhaps among all the different forms of musical performance, singing, whether in solo or as a choral group, more than any other, can inspire and lift the human spirit. I certainly hope that the choral programme can do this for the students in our schools, both those who sing and those who listen to their singing. May I conclude by wishing the Choral Programme and all those who are involved in it success and enjoyment.

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